

For the attention of Ambassadors & Permanent Representatives
of Small Island Developing States to the United Nations, New York

June 9, 2020

Your Excellency,

We are writing to you ahead of the upcoming Security Council election to raise our grave concerns about policies that two candidate countries - Norway and Canada - are currently pursuing which, if implemented, pose a significant risk to our common security and that of future generations.

We recognise that for over a decade, Small Island Developing States have led efforts to highlight the important security implications of climate change and the need to address them as part of the agenda of the UN Security Council.

We believe candidates for election to the Security Council must recognise the climate emergency and be committed to act based on the best available climate science. The Small Island Developing States understand more than most the existential threat posed by climate change to our peace and security, even fundamental statehood, and as such have a strong interest in ensuring that climate commitments are a central consideration when deciding which candidates to support.

The benchmark for any country's commitment to the fight against climate change must be national policies and targets aligned with achieving the Paris Agreement's objective to keep the increase in global average temperature to 1.5°C or well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels.

In 2015, scientists calculated that for a 50% chance of keeping warming below 2°C (a target that is now morally unacceptable, in view of the IPCC's Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C), a third of all known oil reserves, half of gas reserves and 80% of coal reserves would need to remain unused. They advised that development of resources in the Arctic and any increase in unconventional oil production would be incommensurate with the 2°C limit. If we are to avoid exceeding the 1.5°C limit, a much higher proportion of fossil fuels will need to stay in the ground.

Given this, there is no justification for new oil and gas exploration or extraction of any kind. Stopping new projects alone will not be enough - governments must very rapidly phase out existing infrastructure, while securing a just transition for workers and communities. The most recent analysis shows that OECD countries will need to phase out fossil fuel production within 5 years, with non-OECD countries phasing out within 25 years, for a 66% chance of staying below 1.5°C.

Despite this, globally, governments continue to plan for 50% more fossil fuel production by 2030 than is consistent with a 2°C pathway, and significantly greater than double (120%) the production consistent with a 1.5°C pathway. Norway and Canada - both running for UN Security Council seats in the Western European and Others Group - are among those countries actively expanding and subsidizing domestic fossil fuel production.

In making the case for a seat, Norway claims to “promote the implementation of the Paris Agreement”, but Norway is counting on buying international credits to reach its emissions reduction targets for 2020 and 2030. Oil and gas extraction accounted for more than a quarter of Norway’s greenhouse gas emissions in 2018, up 73% percent since 1990, and the new Johan Sverdrup deep-water field alone is expected to significantly increase Norway’s daily oil output. Norway is the world’s seventh largest exporter of emissions - exporting 10 times more emissions than the country produces at home.

Norway’s political leadership has two immediate opportunities to turn this around, instead of accelerating in the wrong direction. On 12th June 2020, the Norwegian Parliament will vote on proposals to dramatically increase tax benefits for the petroleum industry as a response to the Covid-19 crisis. The proposed changes include faster depreciation and an additional uplift to an already generous oil tax regime, that would likely increase and extend activity into vulnerable territories in the Arctic. The Norwegian Ministry of Finance and several of Norway’s leading economists have warned against the changes as they will provoke investments in fields that would otherwise be unprofitable. On 18th June 2020, the Parliament will vote on a government recommendation that completely fails to respect the scientifically-informed delineation of the marginal ice zone management area in the Barents Sea, thereby allowing for continued oil and gas development in the Arctic.

If Norway is serious about implementing the Paris Agreement, its Government should remove rather than increase tax benefits to the petroleum industry, and should revise its position on the marginal ice zone - instead opting for the larger management zone that scientists recommend and committing to phase out oil and gas extraction in this ecologically important and sensitive area.

As part of its Security Council campaign, Canada is promising to integrate climate change into the Council’s regular deliberations and to advocate for the creation of a new Special Representative for climate security. While these promises are certainly commendable, Canada’s 2018 Energy Future plan foresees a 60% increase in fossil fuel production by 2030, and the country remains way off track in its efforts to meet its Paris emissions reduction targets. Canada is the second largest financier of fossil fuels in the G20 (per capita, it’s the highest) - and has been providing at least \$13.8 billion a year in public finance to the oil and gas sector since the Paris Agreement was signed. Export Development Canada - through which much of this oil and gas sector support is channelled - has even loaned money to a number of domestic oil and gas projects that violate the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and have enormous carbon footprints, including the government-owned Trans Mountain Expansion (TMX) pipeline and the Coastal GasLink pipeline.

Now the Canadian government has given Export Development Canada a major role in the Covid-19 response, through two major financing programs that specifically prioritise the fossil fuel industry. The new Business Credit Availability Program will provide loan guarantees of up to \$80 million for small and medium companies – with oil and gas listed as a priority sector. Initially the size of this program was capped at \$65 billion, but has since been expanded to an unknown amount. Another (unnamed) multi-billion dollar program has been created to provide credit support specifically for the oil and gas sector – up to \$100 million per company. So far there is no financial ceiling for this program.

If Canada is serious about implementing the Paris Agreement, the Government should make the temporary moratorium on Arctic oil and gas extraction permanent, shelve major new oil and gas infrastructure projects like the Trans Mountain and Keystone XL tar sands pipelines, and stop subsidizing the oil and gas industry - including through its Covid-19 bailout funds.

For the young generation who will inherit the consequences of these decisions, it is critical that those who claim to be leading on climate action are held to account for decisions they are making back at home. As the Ambassador of a country that understands the grave risk posed to our security and yours, we ask that you raise these issues in your conversations with representatives of the candidate countries, and demand that they unite behind the science. If Norway and Canada are serious about our climate security, they should commit to no new fossil fuel exploration or extraction, and begin phasing down their domestic production at a pace that is consistent with limiting warming to 1.5°C.

Multilateralism depends on respect for others' interests, and there is no greater interest than securing a safe and liveable planet for current and future generations.

Yours sincerely,

Youth activists:

Greta Thunberg (Sweden)

Litokne Kabua (Marshall Islands)

Ranton Anjain (Marshall Islands)

Pauline Tomren (Norway)

Climate & Arctic Scientists:

Hannah Bailey - Scientist, University of Oulu

Jonathan Bamber - Professor of Glaciology, University of Bristol, former President of the European Geosciences Union

Eddy Carmack - Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Emeritus; Order of Canada

Florence Fetterer - Principal Investigator, National Snow and Ice Data Center, CIRES, University of Colorado

Jennifer Francis - Senior Scientist, Woods Hole Research Center

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David Hik - Associate Dean - Academic, Faculty of Science, Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, Simon Fraser University, Canada

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Hans Joachim Schellnhuber - Founder & Director Emeritus of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK)

Martin Siegert - co-Director of the Grantham Institute, Imperial College London

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Julienne Stroeve - Canada-150 Research Chair, University of Manitoba

Peter Wadhams ScD - Emeritus Professor, Dept of Applied Maths and Theoretical Physics, University of Cambridge

Gail Whiteman - Founder of Arctic Basecamp and Professor of Sustainability, University of Exeter

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